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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

12 May 1959

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 17-59

SUBJECT: Church and Party in Poland

Unlike similar battles waged elsewhere in the Satellites during the Stalin era, the current struggle between Church and Party in Poland is not simply a matter of the brutal all-powerful Communist vs. the determined but defenseless cleric. Nor, in this case, can the eventual outcome of the struggle be a foregone conclusion. The Church in Poland, given a remarkable new lease on life in October 1956, is today -- at least potentially -- the most important political force in the country; certainly no other organization can claim the allegiance of so many Poles and no other internal force could so swiftly and easily challenge the ability of the regime to maintain public peace and order. Therefore, we view the Church-Party conflict as a subject for continuing attention, as critical as any of the factors involved in the "more or less chronic state of instability" which our last estimate predicted for Poland.

1. The continuing tug of war between Church and State in Poland may be entering a new phase, signaled by the regime's apparent decision last month to use its power of taxation against certain Church activities and Church orders. Since the Church's financial position may be its most vulnerable spot, this new round may well go to the state. But the winning of one more round will not, of course, assure ultimate victory for the state. The battle is too crucial, too complex, to be resolved in any single round or with any single blow, by either side.

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Indeed, as of this writing, neither side seems to have either the strength, or the nerve, to attempt any sort of sudden knockout punch. Thus there will probably be many more rounds and many more blows before the combat is decided, if ever.

The Current Scene

2. The regime's recent decision to reduce or eliminate certain social welfare activities and construction projects of the Church and perhaps to dissolve certain Church orders (those not under the immediate jurisdiction of Cardinal Wyszyński) came as something of a surprise. Although trials of priests accused of both political and economic offenses have continued, the regime since last summer or fall has tread fairly lightly. Anti-Church and anti-religious propaganda diminished somewhat following the Jasna Gora raid of last July and there have been few specific anti-Church measures since last fall. Cardinal Wyszyński was allowed to leave the country last winter and permitted to spend quite some time in Rome, where he apparently gained the sympathy of the new Pope. The regime itself appeared to be somewhat encouraged, or at least hopeful, that the Vatican had adopted a more flexible policy and it seemed loathe to upset any such prospect for improvement. Official statements at the Polish Party Congress seemed to confirm a relatively soft-line policy, provided, of course, that the Church remained on its good behaviour.

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3. Perhaps the regime will use its economic weapon only very selectively and with caution, avoiding, where possible, direct conflict with the Cardinal and with the most closely-held beliefs of the laity. Financial pressures may be applied -- at least initially -- primarily in retaliation for real or imagined affronts from the Church. If the Church tried to move in on the Boy Scouts, for example, or sought to create sub rosa youth groups of its own, the regime might demand greater tax payments or withdraw certain building permits. Pressure would presumably also be applied to gain gradual ecclesiastical retreats on the political front; the continued use of the Jasna Gora pilgrimages for at least quasi-political-propaganda purposes, for example, might be subject to indirect attack in this manner. In short, the regime may view its new move as a way actively to combat Church influence in a relatively low-key, indirect manner. It would thus hope to avoid extreme Church reaction, would hold out the hope of compromise (particularly to the less militant clerical and lay elements [such as ZNAK]), and would seek to avoid any popular manifestations of disapproval. It would hope, in addition, that in the process it would pacify Party elements who have never approved of the soft line toward religion. And finally, it would presumably hope in this way to satisfy in part the objections of the Soviet leaders, who themselves have recently sought to intensify anti-religious fervor within the USSR.

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Background: The "Aholy" Alliance

4. Party (and State) willingness to reach an accommodation with the Church after the "revolution" of October 1956 was born of both conviction and desperation. Gomulka was convinced -- his conviction to no little extent the result of his own imprisonment -- that it was wrong politically and perhaps even morally to persecute the Church in the manner of his Stalinist predecessors. More important, he recognized the urgent need of the regime for help in stabilizing a potentially explosive situation and knew that the Church was the only possible source of such aid. As it turned out, the Church was not only able but also willing to so serve. Indeed, its general efforts to soothe the restless population and to support the regime in the parliamentary elections of January 1957 (its most notable specific act of support) may well have saved Poland from Soviet intervention.

5. In exchange for just such services (and for the Church's pledge to give "full support" to efforts to "strengthen and develop People's Poland"), the regime released the Cardinal and promised in the written understanding of December 1956 to honor religious liberty in Poland and, in effect, to respect the privileged position and general integrity of the Roman Catholic Church. \*

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\* It also committed itself to honor certain jurisdictional rights of the Church and agreed to the resumption on a voluntary basis of religious teaching in the public schools (though reserving for itself the right to appoint the instructors, "in understanding" with Church authorities). The agreement as a whole was not novel -- it was in large part a restatement of an earlier (April 1950) concordat which the Beirut regime had subsequently and systematically violated. What was new in the 1956 situation was the ~~Approved For Release 2005/07/20 : CIA-RDP80-00006A000100020016-7~~ a meaningful period of time.

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agreement, however, that it sanctioned the reappearance of the Church on the political scene, nor did it leave entirely to chance its ability to contain the Church's tendency to play a political role. Thus, the regime continued to support a number of anti-Church organizations (such as the psuedo-Catholic group, PAX), refused to grant a number of concessions asked by the Church, refused to restore many of its previous rights (such as the control and distribution of charity), and continued its propaganda line against religion in general and the Roman Catholic Church in particular.

6. Nevertheless, as we now know, the reaction of the Church and its members to the December 1956 agreement amounted to more than the regime had bargained for. Able to breathe again after many years of repression -- first under the Germans, then the Communists -- some of the clergy and lay Catholics acted with little restraint. Catholic morality, concerning such matters as legal abortion, contraception, and the marriage ceremony, came into open conflict with civil law. It became very difficult for a non-Catholic student to avoid the "voluntary" classes in religion -- tremendous social pressure, and in some instances force, were applied against those who did not wish to attend. Some zealous rural priests organized popular demonstrations against the burial of Communists in Catholic cemeteries (the only available burial grounds) and, in general, conducted themselves in an overtly anti-regime manner. Not surprisingly,

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sermons sometimes contained anti-regime and anti-Marxist messages. Given considerable freedom, the hierarchy itself moved to the offensive, seeking further concessions from the government, suspending contacts with state officials when these were not forthcoming, and devoting great energy to the cultivation of the youth and the intelligensia. The Cardinal -- quite legally -- organized the Institute of National Vows at Jasna Gora and some of the mass pilgrimages to Jasna Gora soon assumed a quasi-political character.

7. In addition to surprising the regime, the reaction of some Church circles to the December 1956 agreement may have come as something of a shock to the Cardinal as well. Some clerics began to sanction the use of force "in defense of the Faith" and articles in Catholic journals began to criticize the Cardinal, implicitly, for being too soft on the Communists. The Vatican itself appeared to be considerably less than enthusiastic about Cardinal Wyszynski's modus operandi with the Polish state. Indeed, the Cardinal's reception in the Vatican, which he visited in the spring of 1957, appears to have been somewhat frigid. Just as, during the same period, Gomulka was having difficulties with conservatives (dogmatists) within his camp, so Cardinal Wyszynski apparently had to contend with conservatives within the Church.\*

\* This analogy can be expanded. Within the Polish Church, in addition to the conservatives ("maximalists"), there are the liberals ("minimalists"); the Cardinal appears to occupy middle ground. In the Polish Party, in addition to the Stalinist-inclined "dogmatists," there is a liberal wing ("revisionists"); Gomulka is somewhere in between the two extremes. Even in terms of outlook toward foreign authorities, the situation within Church and Party is to some extent analogous. Gomulka would like to follow some sort of Polish road to socialism within the international movement; some Polish Catholics (possibly including Cardinal Wyszynski) would apparently prefer a more Polish road to Catholicism within the universal Church.

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Break-up of the Alliance

8. Despite the flexing of Church muscles in 1957, the regime generally avoided strong countermeasures.<sup>\*</sup> Some of the Church's inroads, insofar as they abetted the process of stabilization, were of temporary benefit to the regime. The primary reason for the regime's caution, however, was its preoccupation with problems elsewhere and its uncertainty about its ability to counter-attack. But in the fall of 1957 and the winter of 1958, the regime slowly and hesitantly began its offensive,<sup>\*\*</sup> meanwhile warning the Church that it had better act with greater restraint. In unpublicized meetings with Wyszynski, Gomulka refused point blank to grant the Church any new concessions and made a few demands of his own; the Cardinal, for his part, refused to retreat from his position and ignored the regime's warnings.

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<sup>\*</sup> Not all members of the Party were in favor of such restraint; Gomulka has been under continuous pressure from Party conservatives to crack down on the Church.

<sup>\*\*</sup> The Cardinal saw it coming. In December 1957, in a letter which could not have pleased the regime, he informed the church at Lourdes that he would be unable to attend its ceremony. "As our Episcopate is in unusual circumstances vis-a-vis the present very delicate situation," he wrote, "we are obliged to stay home to keep vigil over the treasure of the Church's faith in God. Perhaps propitious days will shine for us when we may enjoy the blessed fruits of freedom to worship our God. Today there are only faint rays filtering down to us through the heavy clouds of continuous threats and warnings."

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9. By the summer of 1958, it must have become completely clear to the regime that if it were not going to lose the race it had better move with greater vigor.\* There was little question by then that the Church's definition of religion was almost as broad as the Party's definition of politics. If Church influence continued to expand, what of the Party? And, for that matter, what of "People's Poland?" Unfortunately for the Church, the growing alarm in the Party occasioned by questions such as these coincided last summer with another factor: Gomulka was feeling new confidence in his position and in his program; he now felt strong enough to take more risks and to attack the Church more openly. Concomitantly, he no longer felt so dependent on Church tolerance (though he still could not afford massive Church opposition). Now was the time, Gomulka and the Party must have reasoned, to show the Church that the regime was strong and meant business.

Jasna Gora

10. Casting about for something dramatic and something which offered the State "legal" grounds for action, the regime came up with Jasna Gora. Not only is this a shrine of Polish Catholicism and

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\* The role of the USSR in this affair is a matter of speculation; aside from generalized, implied pressures, however, it would seem that there has been little, if any, direct Soviet involvement.

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nationalism through the ages; it is the symbol of contemporary Catholic action as well. It was here that Wyszynski assembled and addressed special groups -- doctors, lawyers, teachers -- for whom "Roman Catholic morality may differ from legal obligations to the State, as seen by the regime" (as noted by the US Embassy in Warsaw). It was here too that the Church made its greatest use of "religious messages" -- in sermons and pamphlets -- to indicate its hostility to Communism. And it was also here that the Cardinal had first called for the celebration of the 1,000 years of Polish national existence as a Catholic millenium.\* This is a particularly bitter thought to the Party, which seeks to publicize only the "progressive" past in order to help the "building of socialism" in the present.

11. Precisely what happened at Jasna Gora on 21 July is a little obscure. The Church charges that, without warning and without provocation, the Polish militia charged into the Cardinal's Institute of National Vows, manhandled a priest and some lay spectators and invaded a sacred place. The regime claims that prior warnings had been issued, that the militia was called only after a crowd had threatened the use of force, and that the shrine was entered only because it sheltered a mimeograph machine use for illegal publishing activities. Regardless of these

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\* In the words of the Cardinal: "Polonia finita, the Fascists use to say, but Poland will not die. Its fate has been put in your hands, into the hands of the Catholic people. The nation is now facing the millenium of its birth and of its national existence. This common origin of State and Church has led to an almost unique synthesis in the history of nations . . ."

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matters, it seems clear that the Church was using Jasna Gora for activities the regime believed to be both dangerous and illegal. One of the mimeographed booklets published there, "Catholicism and Socialism," for example, was a tract for the clergy which exposed "the incompatibility of Catholicism and socialism" (quotation from the unofficial Vatican newspaper).\*

12. The Church was outraged by the regime's acts at Jasna Gora and condemned them through the pulpit and the foreign press. Cardinal Wyszynski could have, in addition, called for mass protests, but he did not do so, probably because he did not wish to force the regime's hand except as a matter of last resort. In effect, the regime had made its point -- it was prepared to act forcefully, despite the undeniable power of the Church. After Jasna Gora, the Party stepped up some of its anti-Church activities, still, however, at least within the letter of the 1956 agreement. Among other things, nuns and priests without "adequate" pedagogical backgrounds were forbidden to conduct religious classes in the schools and a campaign was inaugurated to remove all religious symbols from the school classroom.

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\* Another item found by the militia -- this was on public sale -- was a book initially published in the twenties, Miracles and Graces Conceded by the Intercession of Our Lady of Czestochowa. While there may have been nothing even technically illegal about the sale of this work, a passage in it describes the salvation of Poland in 1921 during the Russo-Polish War and refers to the "miracle of the Vistula" which saved Warsaw from the "hordes of Bolsheviks."

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What Next?

13. The regime will probably some day seek to abrogate the Church-State agreement. There has never been any secret about this. Gomulka is not in favor of Stalinist measures -- which he views as ineffective anyhow -- but he probably sees the era of true co-existence only as a painful necessity. The question, then, is how long will he be forced to endure the pain? Gomulka, a gradualist and a realist, will probably play a relatively cautious game for some time to come. He probably intends to observe at least the letter of the December 1956 agreement and will certainly seek to avert a clash so resounding as to prompt public demonstrations. Even Gomulka's former worst enemy, onetime Peasant Party leader Mikolajczyk, conceded that despite his "iron will and fanatical courage," Gomulka is a man who "knows the Polish people, especially the peasants." It is thus a safe bet, we think, that Gomulka also knows that Polish Catholicism -- even as a political force -- cannot be stamped out overnight.

14. Gomulka's present adversary, Wyszynski, knows the Polish people too.\* Also a man of great will and courage, the Cardinal can be expected to resist. The effectiveness of such resistance will in large part determine the actions of the regime. It is not, however, a simple matter of the Church's standing firm in the face of adversity. The Party,

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\* Shortly after the events of October 1956, an Englishman (Peter Wiles) observed that Myndszenty in Hungary is of the stuff that martyrs are made, but that Wyszynski in Poland is of the stuff that Cardinals are made.

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last summer, had to move against what it terms "the offensive of militant clericalism" merely to stand still. It is possible that the Church made good use of the time it had to expand its influence. But it is perhaps equally possible that, by moving too fast and too hard, the Church provoked the regime into responding sooner, and with more force, than would have otherwise been the case.

15. Be that as it may, the Party is now determined to push the Church back. Thus it must also be our estimate that in this struggle of militant vs. militant, new disputes, new incidents -- perhaps dramatic ones -- will from time to time come to the surface. There can never be real harmony between the two, only some form of balance and a mutual desire to avoid Soviet intervention. In such circumstances, there is always a chance of miscalculation; either Gomulka or Wyszynski, or both, could make a mistake, with horrendous consequences. And then there are the Soviets, who may someday decide to abandon their (apparent) policy of hands off. Thus it is that Church-State relations in Poland will continue to be a source of serious "instability", one which will deserve particularly careful watching during the year to come.

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